Stillman, Samuel

Sermon at the Ordination of
the Reverend Samuel Shepard

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SERMON

AT THE

ORDINATION

OF

The Rev. Mr. *Shepard.*

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THE
Substance of
A
SERMON
Preached at the
ORDINATION
OF THE
Reverend SAMUEL SHEPARD,
At Stratham, in New Hampshire, September 25. 1771.

By SAMUEL STILLMAN, A. M.
Pastor of the First Baptist CHURCH in BOSTON.

TO WHICH,

The CHARGE, and the RIGHT HAND OF FELLOWSHIP, delivered at the same Time, are added.

BOSTON: Printed by J. KNEELAND, next to the Treasurer's Office in Milk-Street, for PAUL FREEMAN in Union-Street. MDCCLXXII.

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A N

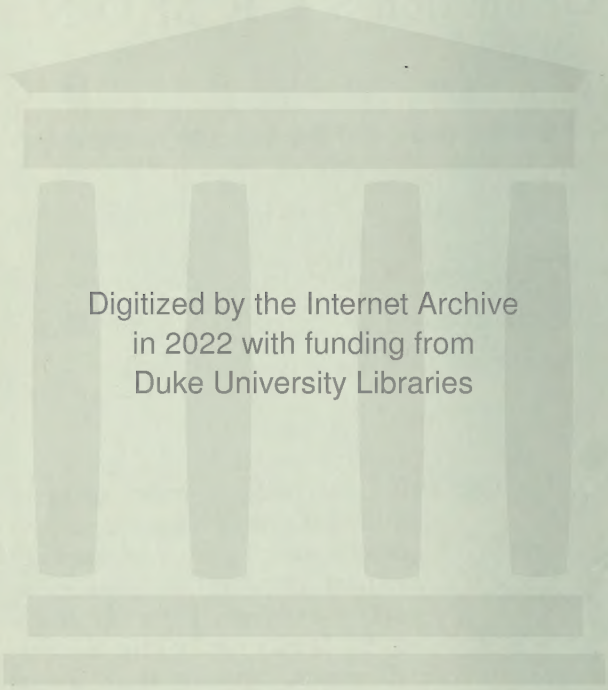
Ordination SERMON.

ACTS XIII. 2.

---The Holy Ghoſt ſaid, Separate me Barnabas *and* Saul *for the Work whereunto I have called them.*---

THE Lord Jeſus, in order to carry on the deſigns of his grace in this apoſtate world, *gave ſome, apoſtles: and ſome, prophets: and ſome, evangeliſts: and ſome, paſtors & teachers.* * It may not be eaſy to aſcertain the preciſe difference, between theſe ſeveral officers in the church of Chriſt; concerning which great and good men are divided in opinion. The great difficulty, I apprehend, lies in making a proper

* Epheſ. 4. 11.



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per distinction between *evangelists*, *pastors* and *teachers*; for *apostles* and *prophets*, are generally allowed to have been *extraordinary* officers, who were confined to the first age of the church. An *apostle* was one who received his authority & qualifications *immediately* from Christ, and had power to work miracles for the proof of his doctrines. Thus *Paul* assures us, that he *neither received the gospel of man, neither was he taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.** And after he had received it, he waited not for an *ordinary* call from the church to preach it, but being *extraordinarily* qualified for, and called to the work of the ministry, he went not up to *Jerusalem* to them who had been *apostles* before him; but set out for *Arabia*, to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ.

A *prophet* was principally distinguished by his special knowledge of *future events*; which he foretold with infallible certainty. Such was *Agabus*, mentioned *Acts* 11. 17.

These are said to be *extraordinary* or *unusual* officers, because they received their call and authority *directly* from God, and were confined to the apostolic age: Since which time they have ceased. None but such as are led away by a spirit of error and delusion, will pretend, in the present day, to be either *prophets* or *apostles*.

An *evangelist* is thought to have been a companion and assistant of the apostles; whose business was

* Gal. 1. 12.

was to preach the gospel in all places to which he *might be sent.* Probably he acted as an *itinerant*, (to use a modern phrase) visiting the churches which had been planted by the *apostles*, for their establishment and edification.

By *pastors* are generally understood those who have the charge of a particular church, and are more immediately confined to it; who are authorized to preach the word, and to administer all the ordinances of the gospel. That there were such officers in the apostolic age, who had the special charge of particular churches, is evident from the following passages of scripture. In *Acts* 14. 23. we read that Barnabas and Paul, *ordained elders in every church* that they visited, after they had departed from *Antioch*. Let it be observed that these elders were ordained in *every church*; consequently *every church* was thus furnished with elders of their own; who were to have a special regard to that particular church in which they were ordained. And when *Paul* arrived at *Miletus*, he *sent* to Ephesus, and called *the elders of the church.** Remark, they were particularly the *elders of the church of Ephesus.* Why of that church rather than any other, but because they had taken the special charge of it? This sense is confirmed by his address to these elders, ver. 28. *Take heed therefore*——to all *THE FLOCK over which the Holy Ghost hath made you OVERSEERS*, or bishops: The greek word being the same here

* Acts 20. 17.

here with that, which in ſome places is ſo rendered. It is apparent that theſe elders had the charge of a particular flock; and that the Holy Ghoſt himſelf had appointed them overſeers of that flock. They were therefore under the moſt ſolemn obligations more eſpecially to attend to it. I will add to what has been ſaid, the words of St. *Peter. The elders who are among you I exhort—Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the overſight thereof, not by conſtraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind.** Here alſo mention is made of a particular *flock*, and the *elders*, or *preſbyters* are exhorted to *take the overſight of this flock* in a ſpecial manner. Neither did their attachment to a particular flock, or church of Chriſt, prevent their making excurſions to thoſe places where their miniſtrations were wanted; ſeeing every church *had* a plurality of elders; hence one might be abſent at certain times, and the church ſtill ſupplied.

With *paſtors* the apoſtle joins *teachers*. It is a matter of uncertainty, who are deſigned by *teachers*. Some imagine that they were, as they are called "gifted brethren"; who were employed by the church in *teaching* only; not having authority to adminiſter baptiſm, or the Lord's ſupper. One upon the place obſerves that he "rather thinks, "that *paſtors* and *teachers* intend one and the "ſame office, that the word *teachers* is only ex- "planative of the figurative word *paſtors* or ſhep- "herds; and the rather becauſe if the apoſtle had "deſigned

* 1 Pet. 5. 1, 2.

"designed distinct offices, he would have used the "same form of speaking as before; and have ex- "pressed himself thus, *and some pastors, and some* "*teachers*; whereas he does not make such a "distribution here as there." But whether or no the preceding remarks convey true ideas of these respective officers in the church of Christ, we are confident of this one thing, that the various qualifications for these offices were *given* by Christ, the glorious head of the church, *for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, and for the edifying his body.** As long therefore, as the same design may be answered in this sinful world, by the gospel ministry, we may expect a succession of faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. He with whom the office originated, will undoubtedly continue it until the grand end of it's institution is fully accomplished. Whose care in this respect is clearly manifested in the text. *As they ministred to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me* Barnabas *and* Saul *to the work whereunto I have called them.* These two men had been engaged in the work of the ministry, long before the transaction spoken of in the text took place, as is evident in the preceding chapter, consequently this *separation* to the work, cannot intend, what is commonly called *ordination*. To suppose this is to invalidate *Paul's extraordinary* call to the apostleship; by which he was *qualified* for, and *authorized* to perform all the parts of the ministerial office; sensible of this, he at once set out on the discharge of the trust reposed in him, without

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* Ephes. 4. 11, 12.

holding a conſultation with thoſe who had been apoſtles before him.* This *extraordinary* call certainly ſuperſedes that which is *ordinary*; or renders ordination by the interpoſition of men unneceſſary: For who can imagine that a man, who had been *ordained* by the Lord Jeſus in an *extraordinary* manner, and had officiated many years as an *apoſtle* by virtue of ſaid *ordination*, ſhould afterwards ſubmit to be *ordained* by men?

And with reſpect to *Barnabas*, we read chap. 11. 22—27. that the church at *Jeruſalem* ſent him to *Antioch* to preach the goſpel; which they would not have done, had he not been fully authorized for it. I apprehend therefore that we are to underſtand by the *ſeparation* of *Barnabas* and *Saul* to the work ſpoken of in the text, a *deſignation* of them to that *particular ſervice*, in which they *engaged immediately after the ſolemnity was ended*; for having *faſted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they ſent them away. So they being ſent forth by the Holy Ghoſt, departed unto* Seleucia, &c. The ſervice they now went upon, was by the direction of the Holy Ghoſt; and which, as one obſerves, was to preach the goſpel to the Gentiles in any, or every place.† The ſolemnity of *prayer* and *faſting*, denotes the anxiety of their brethren that God ſhould go with them, and accompany their labors with ſucceſs: Their *laying hands on them*, may be expreſſive of their warm deſires, that every neceſſary bleſſing ſhould attend them. "This was a ceremony uſed by the "Jews,

* Gal. 1. 15,—20. † Poole's Synopſis in loc.

"Jews, when they wiſhed any bleſſing or happi-
"neſs to attend any perſons"; * thus it may be thought theſe prophets and teachers acted on this occaſion. Nevertheleſs the words afford us ſeveral leading ſentiments, the conſideration of which may be uſeful on the preſent ſolemnity.

I. The *work* to which *Barnabas* and *Saul* were ſeparated.

II. The *call* to this work; *whereunto I have CALLED them.*

III. I ſhall take the liberty to treat of *ordination*, or a *ſeparation* to the ſacred office, becauſe pertinent to our preſent purpoſe, although not intended in the text by *ſeparating Barnabas* and *Saul.*

I. We are to attend to the *work* ſpoken of in the text. Though theſe men were now to be engaged in a *particular ſervice*, as hath been hinted, ſtill it was in preaching the goſpel; for we read, ver. 5. that after their departure from *Antioch*, *they preached the word of God in the ſynagogues of the* Jews: And in the ſubſequent part of the chapter, that they viſited ſeveral cities of the *Gentiles*, declaring that *through Chriſt was preached unto them, the forgiveneſs of ſins*; and having *fulfilled their work*, meaning that particular ſervice on which they ſet out from *Antioch*, they returned, and having aſſembled the brethren, *rehearſed all that God had done with them, and how He had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.* † But I ſhall conſider the office of a miniſter of

* Dr. Gill. † Chap. 14. 26, 27.

Christ, in it's largest sense; preaching the word being but a part of it.

1. He who is engaged in the work of the ministry, should be a *man of prayer*; this solemn duty is inseparably connected with his office. Hence when the apostles called the multitude of the disciples unto them, in order to choose seven men, who should officiate as deacons, they assign the following as one reason of such an appointment, *We will give ourselves continually to prayer.** *Luther* was wont to say, that, "three things are of importance to a "minister, *meditation*, *temptation* and *prayer*." With these he cannot be unacquainted. If private christians should *pray without ceasing*, much more should he who is engaged in the sacred office, carry on a continual intercourse with a God in Christ. His own body of sin, the greatness of his work, the many trials that attend it, and his felt insufficiency for it, will often lead him to a throne of grace. I mean, if he be one whom God hath called to it. The repeated, and numerous occasions which he will find of drawing near to God in this duty, will lead him from his closet to the congregation, and from the congregation to his closet again. In connection with which duty,

2. Is a diligent studying the living oracles. Hence Paul exhorts Timothy *to study to shew himself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*† And in another place, to *give himself wholly to these things.*

* Acts 6. 1,—5. † 2 Tim. 2. 15.

*things, that his profiting might appear to all.** The things to which St. *Paul* endeavors to fix *Timothy*'s attention, are *reading, exhortation, and doctrine*; † different branches of his sacred office. *Reading* is of great advantage to the minister of Christ: Thereby he obtains an increase of knowledge, and a growing fitness for his work. Neither do I mean to confine him in this exercise, wholly to the word of God; though *that* will be readily allowed to be the only rule of faith and practice. For there are many human writers both ancient and modern, that may be read with advantage. If St. *Paul* had read nothing but the scriptures of truth, he could not have brought a citation from the *greek* poets, to corroborate a doctrine he delivered to the *Athenians*; *as certain also of your own poets have said*. ‡ Besides, there are many allusions, or references in the parables, and other parts of scripture, to customs that prevailed among the *Jews, Greeks* and *Romans*, without a knowledge of which, those parts of the word of God cannot be so amply explained; and which can only be acquired by reading *profane authors*, as they are called. After all, the HOLY BIBLE must be received as the source of divine knowledge, and the only criterion of sacred truth; out of which every minister of Christ should bring forth things new and old. Thus furnished from the

[illegible] of heaven,

3. He will go to the people in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ. In the discharge of this part of his office he ought not to shun

* 1 Tim. 4. 15. † Ver. 13. ‡ Acts 17. 28.

ſhun, to declare the whole counſel of God. It is enough for him that any truth is revealed in the holy ſcriptures, and was preached by the apoſtles. Satisfied of this he is not to heſitate whether he ought to preach it, leſt ſome perſons ſhould make a bad uſe of it. Thus ſome talk who profeſs to believe the doctrine of *election*, and of the *ſovereignty* of God in the diſtribution of his grace. But why were they revealed, and why preached by St. *Paul* and his brethren, if they were of ſuch dangerous tendency? At leaſt we ſhall be obliged to confeſs, that the *firſt preachers* were as wiſe and prudent as any of their *ſucceſſors*; and preached the truth as it is in Jeſus. Conſequently the nearer we come to the plan of preaching which they adopted, the nearer we come to the truth: and if truth is delivered, we have nothing to fear reſpecting it's tendency. The word of God ſhall not return unto him void, but proſper in the thing whereto he ſent it. A curſory view of the apoſtolic preaching will convince us, what they thought the leading points in chriſtianity, viz. *The fall of man*, with it's nature and conſequences; and the *glorious recovery by Chriſt*. Theſe they inſiſted on with frequency, plainneſs and zeal: In doing which they were called to treat of faith, repentance, and the various chriſtian practices. For though Chriſt hath finiſhed redemption, it will be of no ſaving benefit to any, but thoſe who believe in him: And no man has the faith of God's elect, who is not led thereby to obedience. *Faith without works is dead.* The righteouſneſs of Chriſt is the only matter of acceptance with God; but no ſinner can apprehend it, and derive comfort from it but by faith; and if his faith be genuine, it will

make

make him careful to maintain good works. The truth believed is the ſpring of evangelical obedience.

4. When he hath thus preached the truth, and ſinners profeſs to believe it, he is, upon their application to him, and ſatisfaction obtained relative to their faith and conduct, to adminiſter the ſpecial ordinances of the new teſtament to them, *baptiſm* and the *Lord's ſupper*. This is the order of the commiſſion as Chriſt gave it to his diſciples, *PREACH THE GOSPEL to every creature; he that BELIEVETH and is BAPTIZED ſhall be ſaved, &c.* With which agree the following words. *Then they who GLADLY RECEIVED THE WORD, were BAPTIZED.** *And when they BELIEVED Philip, preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jeſus Chriſt, they were BAPTIZED, both MEN and WOMEN.*† We ought carefully to attend to the account of theſe ordinances, as we have it in the new teſtament, becauſe they are new *teſtament inſtitutions*, and to adminiſter them according to the pattern therein left us. The difference that ſubſiſts among chriſtians in this matter, as it calls for the exerciſe of *mutual forbearance*, ſo it ſhould lead us with the noble *Bereans* to ſearch the ſcriptures daily, that our faith and practice may be ſuch as ſcripture warranteth.

5. They who have thus believed in Jeſus, and have been added to the church, are called the *flock* of Chriſt; over whom miniſters are *overſeers*, as ſuch they ſhould watch for their ſouls as thoſe who muſt

* Acts 2. 41. † Acts. 8. 12.

must give an account. This part of their duty will lead them not only to teach publicly, but *from house to house.* Private visits among the *flock* are attended with many great advantages. A minister has it more immediately in his power, on such occasions, of removing that *fear* the people are apt to entertain of him; and that *reserve*, which prevents their conversing freely with him, and of rendring himself familiar and easy of access. By this means he will not only have a door open for greater usefulness, but act more compatible with his character as a *disciple of the meek and lowly Jesus*, and a *preacher* of his religion, than should he endeavor to keep the people of his charge at an awful distance, under a notion of supporting his dignity. In the former case the people will esteem him highly in love for his works sake; in the latter, they will fear him, but not love him.

In visiting the flock, ministers should be careful not to spend that time among them, which ought to be devoted to reading, meditation and prayer. Without a solemn attention to these things, a preacher will make but a small proficiency in divine knowledge, and will be confined in his preaching to a small circle; of whom it may be said, "If you hear him once, you hear him always." Whereas he ought to labor to be as a scribe ready instructed the kingdom of God, bringing forth out of his treasure, things *new* as well as *old*. To such negligence as is hinted at above, some men of the sacred character, are strongly tempted, both by an aversion to confinement, and close thinking, and the persuasions of some of their friends, who, from a fond-

ness

neſs for their company, would gladly convince them that much ſtudy is unneceſſary; or that they can preach well enough without it. But St. *Paul* had other views of the work of the miniſtry, when he cried out, *Who is ſufficient for theſe things?* And exhorted *Timothy* to give himſelf WHOLLY to *reading* and *meditation* that his profiting might appear to all. We may from hence learn moſt certainly, that one duty ſhould not ſuperſede another: That viſiting the flock though a duty ſhould not interfere with reading, meditation and prayer.

6. I SHALL only add under this head, that the elders of the church are to *reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-ſuffering and doctrine*; to preſide in the affairs of the church, and continually to go before the flock, as thoſe whom Chriſt hath counted faithful, having put them into the miniſtry. They are not to lord it over God's heritage, but to be *examples to the* flock *in word, in converſation, in charity, in ſpirit, in faith, in purity.** In the diſcharge of every duty, they ſhould behave with meekneſs of wiſdom, conſidering themſelves alſo in the body.

II. THE *call* to this ſacred work comes now under conſideration. *The Holy Ghoſt ſaid, Separate me* Barnabas *and* Saul *to the work whereunto I HAVE CALLED them.* From which words I remark, that *it is eſſential to the character of a miniſter of Chriſt, that he be called by the Holy Ghoſt.* The *nature* of this call I ſhall explain then ſhew it's *indiſpenſable neceſſity.*

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* 1 Tim. 4. 12.

1. HERE I beg leave to premiſe, that every man who engages in this office, ought to be previouſly called out of darkneſs into marvellous light. In other words he ought to be a *good man*; one who has experienced the influences of the Spirit of God, in opening his blind eyes, and turning him from darkneſs to light; and from the power of ſatan unto God. He ought not only to be a man of *gifts*, but *grace*. Though every *real chriſtian* ought not to be a preacher; every preacher ought to be a *real believer*. In fact, if he has never known the plague of his heart, his loſt and periſhing condition both by nature and practice; and derived peace to his guilty ſoul from the finiſhed redemption of the Lord Jeſus; he is deſtitute of the firſt thing requiſite to the miniſterial office. I do not ſay, that faith in Chriſt, or an experience of the goſpel on the mind, qualifies a man to preach it: Verily, many things beſides this, are neceſſary. But I am obliged to believe both from ſcripture and the nature of the thing, that no man, let him have what other gifts he will, ought to engage in the miniſtry, while unregenerate. The office is the ſame it ever was, ſo are the ends to be anſwered by it; the qualifications for it therefore, we may naturally conclude, ought to be the ſame likewiſe. It is obſervable, that Chriſt the glorious Head of the church, *firſt converted* the men whom He afterward engaged in the miniſtry. He did not only endue them with *gifts*, but *effectually called* them by his divine power, *Judas* excepted; whoſe caſe we ſhall hardly be willing to bring as a reaſon why men ſhould be employed in the miniſtry, who have no experience of the power of the goſpel on

their

their ſouls. This inſtance is truly alarming to thoſe who preach the goſpel, and ſhould lead them to inquire whether they are not in his condition; having eminent gifts, and traitors to Jeſus at the ſame time. As for St. *Paul*, he declares that God *called him by his grace, and revealed his Son in him*, in order that he *might preach Him among the Gentiles.** And when he gave charge to *Timothy* reſpecting thoſe who ſhould ſucceed him in the miniſtry, he particularly confines him, ſo far as *Timothy* could judge, to men of real godlineſs: *FAITHFUL men, who ſhould be able to teach others alſo.*† It is alſo evident, from the very nature of the ſacred office, that he who engages in it, ought to be a man of real piety. How ſhall he teach others the things that belong to their peace, who has never been taught himſelf? How ſhall he love a work, which in all it's parts is ſacred, whoſe heart remains at enmity with God? To ſuch an one it will be a taſk, in an attendance to which he will drag on heavily; and rejoice when he can obtain a reſpite from it. How, think ye, ſhall a man preach the doctrine of reconciliation, who hath never been reconciled to God through Chriſt himſelf? How ſhall he converſe with men condemned by the law, and crying out, *What ſhall we do to be ſaved*, ſeeing he knows not what this meaneth? Or how will he behave towards them, who, *believing, rejoice with joy unſpeakable, and full of glory?* The *dejection* of the former, he may perhaps attribute to diſeaſe of body, and therefore adviſe the perſon to call in the help of a phyſician;

* Gal. i. 15, 16. † 2 Tim. ii.

the *joy* of the latter to an over-heated imagination, or to a religious frenzy. And no wonder ſhould this be the caſe; for *a natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, they are fooliſhneſs unto him; neither can he know them, becauſe they are ſpiritually diſcerned.** Farther, it may be aſked, How he can ſupremely ſeek the glory of God, or long for the converſion of ſinners, whoſe own glory or intereſt lies neareſt to his heart; and who has never been really convinced of the value of his own ſoul, and the infinite importance of ſalvation from the curſe of the law? Surely it is prepoſterous even to imagine, that any man in a ſtate of unbelief, or unregeneracy, ſhould be calculated to teach others the way to eternal life, ſeeing he has no true acquaintance with it himſelf. And what an awful thing will it be to preach an *unknown Chriſt*, and after having preached to others, to be a *Caſtaway*! But admitting that the perſon knows the truth as it is in Jeſus, it is neceſſary in order to his entring on the work of the goſpel miniſtry, that——

2. He be called to it by the Holy Ghoſt.—*The work whereunto I HAVE CALLED them.* The ſame ſentiment is implied in the following queſtion, *How ſhall they preach except they be ſent?*† If men run before they are ſent, they have no reaſon to expect that God will either aſſiſt, or ſucceed them; for as no man took on him the honors of prieſthood under the law, but he that was called of God, as was *Aaron*, ſo no man ought to engage in

* 2 Cor. 2. 14. † Rom. 10. 15.

in the miniſtry of the goſpel, who has not a divine call to it. This call may be diſtinguiſhed into *extraordinary* and *ordinary*, *internal* and *external*. I have ſpoken ſomething of an *extraordinary call* to the miniſtry, in a preceding part of this diſcourſe, and ſhall now paſs to conſider an *ordinary call*; which is thus denominated becauſe the *common* or *uſual* method which the Lord now takes, in ſending men forth to preach the goſpel: And it is,

(1.) INTERNAL; which preſuppoſes that the perſon is a real believer, and that he hath thoſe gifts or qualifications for the work, which are requiſite; a particular enumeration of which St. *Paul* hath given us. * It is abſurd to imagine that God would call any man to preach the Goſpel, whom he hath not qualified for it in a good degree; and thoſe whom he hath thus qualified, *he powerfully diſpoſes* to that ſacred employment, by *inſpiring* them with a prevailing deſire to devote themſelves to it at all events; not from motives of *eaſe*, *honor*, *or profit*; for miniſters are *laborers*, and often ſet at naught, and have no right to expect more than food and raiment; but from *love* to God, and precious ſouls. He who thus views the ſacred office, and from the above motive longs to engage in it, appears to be *internally* called. The ſenſe that the godly reformers had of this *inward call* to the work of the miniſtry, is evident in the ſolemn queſtion ſtill retained in the ordination ſervice of the church of *England*, and put to every candidate, previous to the impoſition of hands, "Do you truſt "that you are *inwardly moved* by the Holy Ghoſt

* 1. Tim. 3. 2——8.

"to take upon you this office and miniſtration, to "ſerve God for the promoting of his glory, and "the edifying his people?" To which the candidate replies, "I truſt ſo."

THE office is from heaven, and Chriſt Jeſus will ſee that it is maintained until all his elect are called; and having a free and conſtant acceſs to the human mind, we cannot, or we ought not to heſitate whether he does thus *move* men to engage in the work of the miniſtry; yea, he moves, or inclines ſome ſo ſtrongly to it, that they, with *Paul*, become convinced, that wo is unto them if they preach not the goſpel. But to prevent a miſtake in this affair, it is expedient that the perſon ſhould obſerve, how far divine providence concurs with his governing inclination. If God deſigns a man for the work of the miniſtry, he will open a door to his regular entrance upon it; for whatever end he hath in view, he will overrule every circumſtance to bring it to paſs; conſequently he whom he hath *internally* called, ſhall be.

(2.) EXTERNALLY called alſo. The *external* call lies with the church to which the perſon belongs; who being ſatisfied of his grace and gifts, invite him to the exerciſe of them in a public manner, and appoint him a preacher of the goſpel. The choice and approbation of the church, and ordination by virtue of her power, conſtitutes the *ordinary* call to the miniſtry; which is the method, by which men are now ſent into it; and which ought to be obſerved with great punctuality, in order to prevent ſuch from engaging in it who are

deſtitute

deſtitute of the requiſite qualifications for it. I proceed now,

III. To advert a little to the nature of *ordination*. And here two queſtions demand our ſerious attention, *With whom is the power of chuſing to the office?* And, *How, or by whom is the perſon choſen to be inveſted with it?* As to the firſt of theſe, it is generally allowed that every church of Chriſt, has full power of *chuſing* it's own officers; and that it ſhould be ſo, is agreable both to reaſon and ſcripture. We have a plain account that the church at *Jeruſalem* were directed to *look out* from among themſelves, fit perſons, who ſhould officiate as *deacons*;* or manage the temporal affairs of that church. The *power of chuſing*, we ſee in this inſtance, was in the church. And it is reaſonable that every church ſhould have the ſame power, with reſpect to higher officers. Who can know the perſon's gifts and manner of life, ſo well as that ſociety to which he belongs? Who ſo proper to chuſe as the very perſons who are to ſit under his inſtructions? Shall a man have an undoubted right to chuſe his own *phyſician*, his own *lawyer*, and ſhall he not have liberty to chuſe his own miniſter? Shall he have full power to act in *temporal* things, and be denied the privilege of chuſing in things *ſpiritual*? By no means. How much alarmed ſhould we be, if any man, or body of men ſhould undertake to determine that we ſhould ſit under ſuch a miniſtry; and having it in their power, oblige us to pay a fine for non-attendance? There is not a man of us, who would not eſteem it an impoſition, a horrid

* Acts 6.

horrid violation of our religious rights. And if every man has a right to chuſe in this caſe; ſurely a church of Chriſt or number of believers engaged in covenant, to walk together according to the faith and order of the Goſpel, have ſuch power. A very familiar ſuppoſition cannot fail of making this matter clear as a morning without clouds, viz. Should our brethren the *Epiſcopalians*, aſſume to themſelves a power of *chuſing* miniſters for us *Diſſenters*; we ſhould univerſally deem it an act of injuſtice and oppreſſion. Or ſhould the *Diſſenters* having ſufficient *power*, attempt to chuſe for the *Epiſcopalians*, they would immediately look upon it an infringement of their right of *private judgment*. It cannot but be allowed moſt reaſonable, that every church of Chriſt ſhould chuſe their own officers: This power is committed to them by their adorable Head. "The choice of ſuch church "officers belongeth not to the civil magiſtrate, as "ſuch, or *Dioceſan Biſhops* or *Patrons*; for of "theſe, or any ſuch like, the ſcripture is wholly "ſilent, as having any power therein." *

THE ſecond queſtion to be conſidered is, *How or by whom is the perſon choſen by the church to be inveſted with the office of a miniſter of Chriſt?* The eſſence of ordination conſiſts, I apprehend, in the *choice* of the church, and the *acceptance* of the perſon choſen; but it was the prevailing practice in the apoſtolic æra, for the apoſtles or elders, to be preſent at, and to aſſiſt in the introduction of the candidate into the office of the miniſtry. Neither can I find a ſingle example of ordination

* Cambridge-Platform, p. 11.

ordination in the New Teſtament, without an ordained elder being preſent. In Acts 6. the twelve apoſtles thus addreſſed the church, *Look YE out among you ſeven men, &c. whom we may appoint over this buſineſs.* This they did, and *ſet them before* the apoſtles. The *choice* was with the church, but the *ſetting them apart* with the apoſtles. In Acts 14. we read that Barnabas and Saul *ORDAINED elders in every city.* And St. *Paul* tells *Titus* in his letter to him, *For this cauſe left I thee in Crete, that thou ſhouldſt ORDAIN elders in every city.** If we determine to make the New Teſtament our rule in this matter, and to act agreable to it, we muſt then allow that the *power of chuſing* to office is in the church; and that it is the province of paſtors, or elders, to *ſet apart* ſuch as the church hath choſen;† at the ſame time they cannot act but in conſequence of the invitation or requeſt of the church, over which the candidate is to be ordained. In an extraordinary caſe, indeed, that is, when a church cannot obtain the aſſiſtance of an elder, I imagine that the perſon may proceed to officiate in the ſacred office, by virtue of the *choice* of the church, and his own *acceptance* of it. But that this ought not to be, only in caſes of *real neceſſity*, for the weighty reaſon given above.

I PASS to ſome Reflections on the Subject.

1. FROM hence we learn the ſolemnity and greatneſs of the miniſterial office: They who are engaged in it ſtand in need of great grace, gifts, and knowledge. Was it thoroughly underſtood, by

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* Chap. 1. 5. † See alſo 1 Tim. 4. 14.

those who have entred upon it, they would more feelingly adopt the language of St. *Paul*, *Who is sufficient for these things?* And those who have it in view, would, no doubt, proceed with the greatest caution, lest they should run before they are sent. But I mean not to discourage you, my Brother, who design this day to devote yourself to that solemn service. It is great, and you are sensible of your insufficiency for it: But you have the greatest encouragement to go forward. The Lord hath made your way plain before you; and hath declared that he will be with his faithful servants *alway, even to the end of the world.* Go in peace, and the Lord be with you.

2. I OMIT many observations which would be natural here, and only add, That there is a manifest propriety in reminding the people of their duty to their minister on this occasion. The connection between them is *sacred*, and the obligations *mutual*. If he whom you have chosen to serve you in the gospel is to lay himself out in your service, and to give himself *wholly* to it, you ought to endeavor to assist him as much as lieth in your power. Particularly pray for him. When you are admitted to a throne of grace bear him on your minds. Do not expect too much from him; but consider him as a man of like passions with yourselves. This will incline you to guard against unreasonable prejudices, and to make every proper allowance for the frailties of human nature. Stand by him at all times of trial, and be ready to bear a part of his burdens; and to advise in all difficult matters which may come before the church. In fine,

Remember

Remember that *they who are taught in the word should communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things. Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn.* * *Do ye not know*, says the same apostle in another place, *that they who minister about holy things live of the things of the temple; and they who wait at the altar are partakers of the altar. Even so hath the Lord ORDAINED*, that *they who preach the gospel should live of the gospel.* † How plain is the duty of a people to their minister, held forth in these words. It is an *ordinance* of God, that they and their families should have a comfortable maintenance. Many people look upon what they give to support the gospel-ministry as a *gratuity*; but it is what they have a *right* to expect from the appointment of the Lord Jesus Christ: And I imagine what those christians do with their consciences, who have ability and yet neglect this duty, seeing it is written as with a sun-beam in the oracles of God. A minister is to be continually at the call of the people, he must preach in season, and out of season; how then shall he and his family be supported, unless they whom he serves provide for them? I do not urge this matter at present, from any suspicion that you, my Brethren, of these churches, need to be convinced of your duty in this respect, or that you will be backward to discharge it, no; but because it is shamefully neglected in many of the churches of our denomination; an error which I would gladly correct both for the sake of ministers and people. And if any

* Gal. 6. 6. † 1 Cor. 9. 9, 13, 14.

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